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## ABSTRACT

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This monograph examines the question of what will happen on the Korean peninsula if North Korea collapses without a fight. In 1996 the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) appears to be on the verge of disintegration due in large part to Kim Il Sung's philosophy of "juche" or self-reliance (which is nothing more than the political, economic, and social isolation of North Korea), the disastrous flooding of 1995 resulting in widespread famine, and disproportionate military spending at the expense of economic development and social welfare. The collapse of the DPRK will mark the end of the Korean War and require that the "victors" conduct post-conflict operations for which they are responsible.

Four possible scenarios for collapse are advanced; two "soft landing" and two "hard landing." The "soft landing" scenarios result in gradual reunification in accordance with the Republic of Korea's three phase reunification plan. The "hard landing" scenarios cause tremendous suffering, increased instability, and require intervention in order to stabilize the peninsula and prevent spillover both to the north and south as well as massive migration of the north's population.

In order to determine what the US should do as well as what it can do, the strategic interests, objectives, and concerns of China, Russia, Japan, the ROK, and the US are analyzed. The common theme among all is the desire to benefit economically from a stable peninsula and the Tumen River region could become the economic center of gravity for Northeast Asia and become the carrot that could attract cooperation among all the powers of the region and the US.

Finally, the monograph concludes by presenting the four mission essential tasks which must be accomplished following DPRK collapse: (1) establishment of security and stability; (2) humanitarian relief operations; (3) security of nuclear research, production, storage, and delivery facilities; (4) disarming, demobilizing, and resettling the DPRK military. In order to accomplish those tasks the UN Security Council should recognize its responsibilities for conducting post-conflict operations to restore order in the north, establish a mandate for such operations, and build a coalition among the Northeast Asian powers and the US to conduct combined operations under the command of the current UN Command.

# **CATASTROPHIC COLLAPSE OF NORTH KOREA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES MILITARY**

A Monograph

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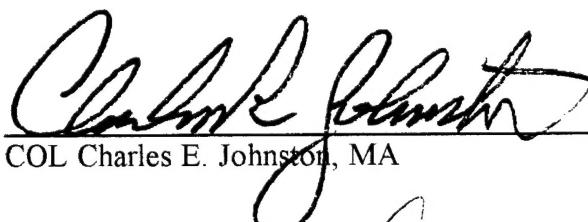
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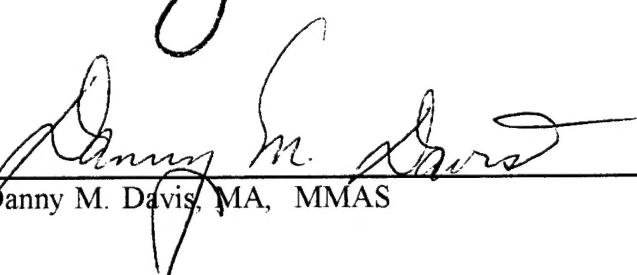
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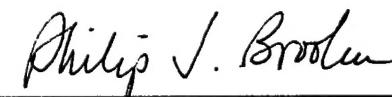
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## ABSTRACT

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## I. Introduction

If you concentrate exclusively on victory, while no thought for the after effect, you may be too exhausted to profit by peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war.

B.H. Liddel-Hart<sup>1</sup>

The United States (US) has always been well-focused on attaining victory in war and, as shown in post-World War II Europe and Japan, it has even conducted successful post-conflict operations which did not lead to Liddel-Hart's "germs of another war." The question that must now be asked is: Can the US conduct successful "post-conflict" operations in a country like Korea if a "second" war does not take place? Will the US be "exhausted" by its long-awaited "victory" if North Korea collapses without a fight and thus leave the germs of another war on the Korean peninsula? Never before has the US been involved in a war in which post-conflict activities have not been undertaken until some forty to fifty years after an armistice was signed. Is it prepared to do so now?

The US National Security Strategy states that the "tensions on the Korean Peninsula remain the principal threat to the peace and stability of the Asian region,"<sup>2</sup> and, as a result, planning for the defense of the Republic of Korea (ROK) from attack by the North is the primary focus of the United Nations Command (UNC), Combined Forces Command (CFC), Republic of Korea (ROK), and United States Forces Korea (USFK) military commands. It is prudent to prepare for the most dangerous and perhaps, in this case, even the most likely course of action; however, it can also be argued that it is prudent to examine other potential courses of action and at least prepare concept plans that can be finalized if and when indicators show that such other courses may come to fruition.

For the past forty three years the UNC, consisting primarily of ROK and US forces, has prepared for the defense of South Korea from attack from the north by the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK). While both sides continue to prepare for a second Korean War, in reality, the first one has not concluded. However, given the

end of the Cold War and the recent internal problems in the DPRK, the question must be asked: Are other scenarios possible, such as the catastrophic collapse of North Korea, and if so, what is the impact on the UNC, ROK, and US military forces as well as other regional actors if such a collapse occurs? Or to put it another way: Can the Korean War come to an end without a second round of direct military combat action by either side? The purpose of this monograph is to examine an alternative to such an attack, deduce the long-term and near-term strategic interests of the major powers, and determine a possible course of action for UNC, ROK, and US forces should the DPRK collapse without a fight. The reason that this must be addressed is perhaps best summed up by Nicholas Eberstadt in his recent work on Korean reunification. He states that the west does not understand northeast Asia well at all and he asserts that “for more than four decades, events in Korea have consistently taken Washington by surprise. Indeed, nearly all of the great and terrible events that have defined the Korean drama since the peninsula’s partition have caught American policymakers unprepared.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, while the UNC, ROK, and US forces are well-prepared to defeat an attack from the north, by Eberstadt’s indictment of US policy, it is imperative that the military, as well as the policy makers, not be surprised by a North Korean catastrophic collapse. The best way for the UN, ROK, and US policy makers to be prepared is for the military to have multiple options available should scenarios other than the most dangerous occur.

This paper is organized into four sections and uses a modified “backward planning” structure and an adaptation of the strategic estimate process from Joint Publication 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations as it works backward from the long-term regional interests to near-term actions following the North’s catastrophic collapse as well as looking at the broader issues first and then concluding by focusing on the more narrow military actions.<sup>4</sup> The first section introduces the potential problem of North Korean collapse and frames the overall monograph by examining the primary and secondary research questions and outlining their significance. The second section examines the

current North Korean situation and scenarios for collapse and summarizes the ROK's reunification policy. In the third, the long term interests of the major regional powers and the US following Korean reunification are addressed as well as the near term interests following the collapse of the DPRK. Finally, identification of a feasible, acceptable, and suitable course of action for the UNC, ROK, and US military forces will be addressed in the fourth section..

The fundamental hypothesis for this monograph is that the US military does have a role on the Korean peninsula following the catastrophic collapse of North Korea. The role is both long-term and near-term; with the long-term role having primacy. However, such a role is inextricably linked to the near-term actions that the US takes following collapse. Furthermore, it is likely that any US actions taken must be in conjunction with a coalition most likely working through the UN. To determine the near-term requirements it is necessary to analyze the future security interests and concerns of not only the US but also the regional powers, and to develop a vision of the end state desired by the US as well as the other actors. Once this end state is determined it will be possible to backward plan to identify the near term requirements for the UNC, ROK, and US militaries.

It is possible that North Korea is near collapse. Recent statements by key officials show that US and ROK national leadership are becoming increasingly concerned with this possibility, although the focus remains on the possibility that such disintegration may lead to a desperation attack. In a recent article in Jane's Defence Weekly, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant General Kenneth Minihan said, "North Korea is collapsing economically. North Korea is implosion and explosion going on at the same time."<sup>5</sup> His premise is that the situation is so complex that a new analytical process is required to determine when the North will attack. However, this condition of simultaneous implosion and explosion may also lead to the catastrophic collapse of North Korea resulting not in conventional or nuclear attack but in a non-conventional conflict.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the current Commander in Chief, United Nations

Command (CINCUNC) General Gary E. Luck believes that the question is not *if* North Korea disintegrates but *when* it disintegrates will it be by implosion leading to catastrophic collapse or explosion leading to a desperation attack?<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, a recent report from the Korean Advisory Council on Democratic and Peaceful Reunification (ADCDP) states that North Korea is facing greater internal instability than ever and that its imminent collapse may not result in an attack of the ROK because the regime is unlikely to receive the military and economic aid necessary from Russia or China.<sup>8</sup> If such a collapse occurs, the question to be answered is: What action *should* the US military take and what action *can* it take given the political and military realities of the region? This, then, is the fundamental purpose of this monograph: to examine a potential scenario that does not appear to be often discussed in either the media or academic writing (at least until very recently), attempt to determine possible issues resulting from such a scenario, and recommend a possible response for the US and ROK military forces and the UNC as well.

#### Primary Research Question

What is the US military role on the Korean Peninsula if North Korea collapses without a fight?

This is the key question to be answered. Should the US simply withdraw when the DPRK collapses or should it have a primary or supporting role in the events that follow? It is likely that given the current domestic political situations in both the US and the ROK, there will be a significant public outcry for the US to remove its forces from the peninsula. On the other hand, as this monograph will show, there are security issues that may cause the US to decide to maintain a military presence on the peninsula in the future. However, to do so may require the US military to be engaged in operations, either bilaterally with the ROK military or under the flag of the UNC, in North Korea *immediately* following its collapse. Any delay in implementation of a post-collapse plan

could result in the US forfeiting its future ability to directly influence events on the peninsula.

### Secondary Questions

1. What are possible scenarios if North Korea suffers from catastrophic economic and political collapse which does not result in a desperation attack to the south?

This question is important because it will determine the possible courses of action which the UNC, US, and ROK military forces must develop. Four broad scenarios seem possible. First, a coup takes place in which the current regime is overthrown and replaced with leadership which desires reunification with the South. Government infrastructure remains at least marginally effective. This would likely lead to the most stable transition to reunification. Second, a complete collapse of the DPRK government occurs and is not replaced by any national level leadership. The result is a complete breakdown of the North Korean society with all the humanitarian tragedies that accompany the chaos of a society out of control. In this case North Korean civilians are likely to attempt to cross the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in search of peace, stability, and a better way of life.

The third scenario is the most problematic. It involves the overthrow of the current regime with competing factions fighting for control. In effect, a North Korean civil war breaks out and with it, like the second scenario, the people suffer horrifically and many attempt to come south as well as north to China and Russia. While in the second scenario there is chaos and suffering, in this one there is chaos, suffering, and open military conflict among factions fighting for control. The last, and perhaps most improbable but certainly the most desirable scenario, is that Kim Chong Il remains in power but recognizes that his power base is too weak and that he can no longer effectively govern. In this case he approaches the South and seeks reunification in accordance with the ROK's long term reunification policy or variation thereof.

2. What is the ROK reunification strategy?

The ROK Committee for Reunification provides the guidance on Korean reunification using a three phase strategy that extends over several years in order to allow a smooth transition to a unified peninsula. The first stage consists of reconciliation and cooperation between the north and south, with expansion of trade as well as communication between the populations of each country. The next stage is the establishment of a Korean Commonwealth, and then finally complete reunification. This is a policy of agreement, unlike Germany which consisted of reunification through absorption and Vietnam, which was reunification by conquest.<sup>9</sup> It is important to understand this policy because it may provide the best framework for dealing with DPRK collapse despite the fact that it was not designed for such a scenario.

3. What near term course of action might the Republic of Korea possibly adopt in the event of catastrophic collapse in the north?

This question stimulates more questions than answers. Would the ROK assert its sovereign right over the peninsula and unilaterally attempt to stabilize the north and subsequently complete reunification? Would it request UN, US, or other regional power assistance or would it accept such assistance if offered? Would it attempt to keep the north sealed from the south to prevent massive migration or would it allow one way movement of its southern businesses to the north in order to exploit the natural and population resources? The answers to the questions are difficult, if not impossible, to determine from any open sources; however, the various major scenarios must be considered as they will significantly affect any action taken by UNC or US military forces.

4. What are the long term strategic interests, objectives, and concerns of the major Northeast Asian powers: China, Japan, Russia, and Korea, if North Korea suffers from a catastrophic collapse and the peninsula is reunified under a ROK dominated government?

For the purposes of this study long-term is considered some fifteen to twenty years following the collapse of the DPRK. This time frame is used because the effects of North Korean disintegration will likely be felt for at least that long and it is reasonable to assume that the peninsula will not become stable for that period if the South Korean reunification plan were implemented under ideal conditions with agreement reached by both sides.

The long-term interests of all the regional powers revolve around economic prosperity for themselves resulting from a secure and stable peninsula. While each will be wary of the others' intentions while they strive for economic superiority, they likely will not risk military confrontation at the expense of a stable economy unless a significant security threat emerges.

5. What are the near term strategic interests, objectives, and concerns of the major Northeast Asian powers, China, Japan, Russia, and Korea, following the catastrophic collapse of North Korea?

As with long term interests, the short term interests will revolve around maintaining stable and growing economies. In the short term, the security concerns will be much greater as the fear of spillover of civil strife in the collapsed DPRK will cause all regional powers to seek ways to guarantee their borders while maintaining the long term potential for economic gain. All powers will want to rapidly gain a foothold in the north in order to exploit the natural resources available there. Significantly, the single most important security concern will be the fate of the nuclear development program in the North. There will be two guiding precepts: first, that any nuclear weapons be located and secured so as not to be used by potential rogue elements seeking to further destabilize the region and second, that a reunified Korea doesn't gain control of the program and become a nuclear power in its own right.

6. What are the long term strategic interests, objectives, and concerns of the US after a North Korean catastrophic collapse?

The US strategic interests, like those of the other regional powers will revolve around the economy. However, in order to maintain economic growth a secure and stable peninsula must exist and the domination by any single regional power must be prevented. Because of this, the US may deem it necessary to maintain a military presence in Korea to assist in stabilizing the region as well as maintaining its own influence.

7. What are the near term strategic interests, objectives, and concerns of the US after a North Korean catastrophic collapse?

As with the other powers the US is likely to seek immediate stability in the region in order to maintain current trading practices. The focus for the US will probably be on dismantling the nuclear program under the auspices of the UN. It will want to avoid an immediate large-scale withdrawal of forces from the peninsula until the situation is well stabilized as well as to maintain its options for involvement in any future long-term security arrangements. A full-scale withdrawal of US forces from the peninsula is likely to cause the US to lose its ability to maintain influence within the region and that only in the event of a major outbreak of hostilities would US troops be reintroduced into the Korean theater.

8. What would be the possible courses of action for the UNC, CFC, the ROK military, and USFK if such a collapse occurred in the north?

The possible courses of action following a collapse of the DPRK center around four distinctly separate possibilities which all have significant political, military, and economic advantages and disadvantages. The first is that the ROK takes unilateral action to stabilize the north and embark on reunification by absorption. The ROK government conducts the humanitarian assistance and security operations necessary to bring stability

and set the conditions for a reunified peninsula. This is the “go-it-alone approach” which is likely to be the most politically acceptable to the US public and probably the Korean public as well. The second is that bilateral ROK and US humanitarian and security operations be conducted in much the same way as the first; however, involvement by the US will ease the financial burden on the ROK and allow for continued US influence in the region. The third approach is that of a coalition effort under the flag of the UN to administer humanitarian and security assistance to bring peace and stability to the region. Finally, the fourth is that in which a coalition of the regional powers which excludes the US is established to deal with the situation. Which is the best course of action, what would it take to implement such a course, and the advantages and disadvantages of such a course of action will be answered in the final section.

## II. Current North Korea Situation, Collapse Scenarios, and ROK Reunification Policy

If in taking a native den one thinks chiefly of the market that he will establish there on the morrow, one does not take it in the ordinary way.

Lyautey: The Colonial Role of the Army,  
Revue Des Deux Mondes, 15 February 1900<sup>10</sup>

Is North Korea on the verge of collapse from within and if so what are the likely events that will take place if such a collapse occurs? The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has been on a downward spiral at least since the mid-1980s. The effect of a command directed economic system with disproportionate emphasis on military expenditures, combined with the unique North Korean philosophy of “juche,” or self-reliance which is in effect economic, political, and social isolationism, the end of the Cold War with the attendant loss of its patrons the Soviet Union and China, and the recent flooding have led to the present instability which ultimately may cause it to self-destruct. This section addresses the current state of North Korean affairs and the indicators which

show why it may collapse in the near future, the four scenarios of collapse, and why an attack of the South is possible but not likely. It concludes with a summary of the ROK's reunification policy and plan.

There are six major indicators that show that the DPRK is increasingly unstable and possibly facing imminent collapse. These include the famine caused by the 1995 monsoon flooding, the increasing economic disintegration, the internal political problems as evidenced by the increasing number of defections by members of the elite, the apparent lack of transition of Kim Jong Il as the successor to his father, the seemingly incoherent foreign policy, and finally the disavowing of the 1953 Armistice agreement culminating in the statements that it will no longer recognize the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the ROK and DPRK.

The recent famine caused by the unusually heavy monsoon rains in the summer of 1995 has led to the worst famine in North Korea since the Korean War ended. According to the UN, North Korea will have a shortage of nearly two million tons of grain through 1996 and it estimates that some 2.1 million children and almost half a million pregnant women will need emergency food aid.<sup>11</sup> Additional evidence of the severe problems caused by the famine includes three alleged cases of cannibalism which supposedly caused "paranoia and fear" in the North and led to calls for a crackdown and investigation by internal security forces.<sup>12</sup> As General Luck, CINCUNC, recently said in his March 28, 1996 testimony before Congress, the people who are not dying are taking extreme steps for survival.<sup>13</sup> It is possible that the citizens of the north may no longer be satisfied by the so-called "juche" philosophy developed by Kim Il Sung. The result of this famine may lead to food riots, causing further crackdowns by internal security forces and the military, and thus begin the vicious cycle leading to further destabilization, if it has not already begun. The ROK Agency for National Security Planning reports that the DPRK "seems to be preparing to mobilize its soldiers if hungry civilians revolt against the government."<sup>14</sup>

North Korea's command directed economy has been steadily declining since the end of the Cold War by a rate of 3% to 5% annually and in 1994 its growth rate was measured at zero percent.<sup>15</sup> There are two primary reasons for this decline. First, the DPRK continues to spend between 20% and 25% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense expenditures while at the same time its two historical Cold War allies, the Soviet Union (now Russia) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have ceased to provide subsidies to help prop up its economy.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, these countries now demand that trade be conducted with hard currency, something which is lacking in the DPRK.<sup>17</sup> The Chinese are currently advising their businesses not to deal with Kim's regime because of its inability to pay.<sup>18</sup>

Although information from the north is difficult to come by, the increase in defections from the DPRK is a telling sign of the current internal problems. Taking into account that defectors' stories are sometimes suspect, it is clear that one thing has changed: the amount of high level persons defecting has grown significantly in recent months. There have been defections by members of the diplomatic service in Africa, trade mission members in Europe, and even Kim Jong Il's first wife defected while in Russia and is reportedly considering asylum in South Korea.<sup>19</sup> Kim Jong Il is apparently so concerned with the growing dissent within the DPRK that he has allegedly said that "ideological education must take priority over academic education."<sup>20</sup> The US State Department's 1996 report on human rights notes that North Koreans fall into three categories: "core," "wavering," and "hostile," with more than 75% of the population falling into the latter two.<sup>21</sup> What this evidence shows is that there is at least the beginning of the transferring of allegiance of the elites of North Korean society away from the regime. As Crane Brinton writes in his seminal work on revolutions, along with the disintegration of the economic and political machinery of the state, this transfer of allegiance of the elites calls attention to the impending breakdown of the status quo.<sup>22</sup> While it is almost impossible to tell if there are any significant opposition groups formed

for which these elites can transfer, it is clear that with the recent spate of defections the seeds of transference are present and there are dire internal problems and dissatisfaction with the current regime.

A fourth indication of instability is the fact that Kim Jong Il has yet to formally, or at least publicly, establish himself as the leader of the party and accept the reigns of power. This makes negotiation and diplomatic activities difficult as well as begging the question as to why the apparent leadership vacuum has been allowed to continue for nearly two years since the death of Kim Il Sung. His current wife explains that the reason for this is that the two year mourning period is not complete.<sup>23</sup> Only recently has Kim Jong Il received a foreign dignitary, the hard-line Russian Defense Minister, Marshall Dmitri Yazov. This event in itself is confusing because it is an apparent snub of both China and the moderate Russian leadership, both of whom the DPRK needs for economic support yet who have each normalized relations with the ROK.<sup>24</sup> This certainly cannot help the DPRK gain needed aid from these countries.

The nuclear issue has been one of the most publicized concerns in Northeast Asia in the past few years. Like his father did with China and the Soviet Union in 1950 and even throughout the Cold War, Kim Jong Il seems to be playing all sides against each other for the DPRK's benefit. The nuclear situation has bought him needed concessions from the west, including the future light water nuclear reactor but more importantly much needed fuel from the US. However, this strategy, when tied to its call for unilateral talks with the US, while excluding the ROK, about a peace treaty and normalization of relations, is clearly an attempt to defeat ones enemies indirectly by attacking the alliance of those enemies as Sun Tzu espouses.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, continuing to make conventional and military threats against the south while at the same time trying to court US favor do not seem to be actions stemming from a coherent foreign policy and, as with the issue of the leadership vacuum not yet filled by Kim Jong Il, again begs the question as to who is in charge and is the north a rational actor?

Finally, in a continuation of the political-military vein begun above, the most recent statements by the north in regards to the DMZ again show signs of the chaos of the internal situation. On April 4, 1996 the DPRK announced that it "shall give up its duty, under the armistice agreement, concerning the maintenance and control of the military demarcation line and the DMZ."<sup>26</sup> Combining this statement, the three subsequent incursions into the DMZ, and Kim Jong Il's five recent inspections of front-line forces, many fear that this is a prelude to offensive action.<sup>27</sup> However, this might not be an indication of imminent hostilities, but rather it is possible that it is a further attempt to exact concessions from the west, or it is an additional means of trying to split the alliance and discredit the south by provoking it into taking some kind of aggressive action. It could also be for internal DPRK purposes to bolster military support due to a crumbling political base. On the other hand, perhaps this is a prelude to allowing the mass migration of hungry citizens across the DMZ in order to ease the burden on the DPRK while at the same time possibly forcing the ROK into a position in which it denies entry, or even better yet, uses force to stop such crossings, thus providing the north with a propaganda coup and increased leverage which it can use to solicit international aid. The fact is that the intentions and internal problems of the DPRK are difficult to discern, yet from the short discussion above it is clear that all is not well in the worker's paradise.

The most serious question to be answered is: Based on the DPRK situation laid out above, will the north attack the ROK in an attempt to shoot its way out of its internal problems? Many people, including the CINCUNC and the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) worry that this may be the case and rightly so, as this would cause tremendous casualties and destruction in both the north and south. However, there are others who do not believe that an attack is likely or even possible. A recent, supposedly "top secret" US intelligence report says that China does not believe that the DPRK will attack for four primary reasons. First, its readiness is low due to the famine, use of the military for internal security, and lack of resources which have caused training

to be scaled back significantly. Second, the severe fuel shortages do not allow its military to conduct sustained operations. Third, there is a great fear that such action will cause the regime to lose all internal control as opposed to shoring up control by focusing on the ROK threat to the DPRK as many in the west believe. Finally, and most important, the DPRK cannot no longer count on support from China and Russia as it did during the first Korean War.<sup>28</sup>

If the north is not intent on conducting offensive operations, then what alternatives exist? The first is that the status quo will be maintained with the DPRK receiving outside aid that ends its famine and economic problems and brings internal stability, thus revitalizing the strength of the current regime. However desirable this scenario might be, in the author's opinion, it now appears that the most likely course for North Korea is one which results in its collapse. The issue in that case is whether the collapse will be a catastrophic "hard landing" or whether the DPRK will have a "soft landing." Ahn Byong-joon writes in Foreign Affairs that only through gradual economic reform and with help from the west can the DPRK have a "soft landing" of reform along with economic and political integration in the world community. However, due to the regime's rigid nature, a "crash landing" leading to a sudden and unstable reunion with the south is more likely.<sup>29</sup> Although the possible scenarios for the north are limited only by one's imagination and many variations of the following are conceivable, two broad "soft landing" and two "hard landing" scenarios will be addressed.

The ideal soft landing situation would be for Kim Jong Il to recognize that he is not able to govern his country nor adequately provide for the people's needs. He would realize that his only means of maintaining peace and stability would be to seek reconciliation with the south and embark on a phased reunification program. However, from all accounts this course seems unlikely.

A more plausible scenario is one in which elements of the current regime from the military as well as the bureaucracy depose Kim in a bloodless coup and install a moderate

regime that either embarks on far-reaching economic and political reform or seeks reconciliation with the south. This would be desirable because it is possible that the reformist regime would be more practical if not more moderate. Nevertheless, this course could provide a stable base from which to either reunify the peninsula or at least reduce tensions below the current level. However, regardless of how much either of these “soft-landing” scenarios are desired, neither is likely to occur. What appears more likely are either of the following two “hard landing” ones.

In the first, there is a complete collapse and disintegration of the national government. This would occur if the ruling elite decided that total breakdown or possibly a coup was imminent and then sought asylum in another country such as China or perhaps even a western country such as Switzerland. Accompanying the collapse of the national government would be the breakdown of the internal security apparatus. This would lead to chaos in the country as some of the population might begin to fight for limited resources while other segments begin the inevitable migration north across the Tumen and Yalu Rivers, south across the DMZ, and even afloat in a “boat people” phenomenon, with all searching for a place where they could acquire the basic necessities of life which, since the end of the Cold War and the most recent famine, have become increasingly scarce. The impact of this scenario obviously has grave consequences for the countries in Northeast Asia as they would most likely experience a massive influx of people for which they would not likely have the resources to support. For the ROK, the migration of people would impose not only a significant burden on its support structures but also on its military and security apparatus as the fear of Kim’s sympathizers might cause extraordinary population control measures to be instituted. It should be remembered that a significant amount of the population, some 1.2 million men, are under arms and in a collapse scenario there would not be any internal demobilization conducted. Additionally, the nuclear facilities cannot be overlooked. Control of nuclear technology or weapons, if they exist, could provide certain elements of the DPRK with significant

monetary potential by selling them to rogue nations or international terrorist organizations.

While the above case is certainly ominous, the following one bodes even worse for the region. In this final situation multiple factions exist and one of them conducts a coup to oust the Kim dynasty and his remaining followers. The coup could be either violent or bloodless; however, what makes this scenario different is that infighting occurs as these factions struggle for power. As in the above scenario, breakdown of the national government occurs. That a civil war beyond imagination could break out and spillover into neighboring countries is likely as those 1.2 million armed men take sides and fight for survival. Again, there will be massive migration of the population searching not only for a better life but also to escape the devastation caused by the civil war. Additionally, the same issues concerning the nuclear facilities would exist.

The initial issue for the UNC and the ROK is to determine what is happening and which scenario is occurring. It is difficult now to understand what is happening in the DPRK with a functioning government, so how can outsiders analyze internal events and determine what is taking place when collapse is in the process of occurring? This is important because while there will be many common problems in each scenario, the actions of the countries in the region would probably be vastly different between each hard landing situation. The answer lies in the research and analysis currently being conducted by the International Relations Officer of the J5 Policy Branch of US Forces Korea, Robert Collins. He has laid out a series of “foreseeable patterns” of social infrastructure collapse as brought on by severe resource shortages and determined a seven phase process leading to the total collapse of the North Korean political system.<sup>30</sup>

Careful observation of North Korean events using Collins’ seven phases provides analysts with a capability to interpret those events and determine what is taking place in the DPRK. The first phase is resource depletion resulting from mistakes in domestic and foreign policy which cause failure of major components of the economic system. It is

likely the fundamental failure of the late Kim Il Sung's "juche" policy which effectively isolated the DPRK from market economies, combined with the recent natural disaster caused by the 1995 monsoons which has led to severe resource shortages. The second phase is prioritization which occurs as a result of the resource shortfall. Either singly or in combination, two "selective provision policies" are implemented. Each sub-element of the economic system receives a less than minimum maintenance allocation of resources or selected elements receive no resources so that others may be maintained. In the third phase local independence takes hold to intentionally circumvent established centralized policy.

Suppression characterizes the next phase in which the government takes necessary measures to counteract the actions of the local independent organizations which are in contradiction to centralized state policy. According to Collins this is the most "pivotal" of phases. Effective suppression by internal security forces can maintain the regime's survival, whereas ineffective suppression will push at least some elements of the population to the next phase which is resistance. The level of resistance will be elevated both horizontally and vertically, organizationally and violently. The sixth phase is fracture and is the result of the core elements of the regime splitting into factions due to their objection to methods in dealing with the resistance. The final phase is realignment of the national leadership which undertakes reforms based on its perception of how to deal with the resistance. Collins lays out between four and seven specific indicators for each phase which provide a foundation for understanding where North Korea is in its process of collapse or reform. Collins also posits that even if the fracture phase is reached, it does not necessarily mean that immediate or peaceful reunification with the south will occur.<sup>31</sup>

What emerges from the above discussion is that North Korea is obviously in the midst of significant internal turmoil resulting from a variety of causes. How the UNC, CFC, ROK, and USFK military forces, in conjunction with political leadership and aid organizations, deal with the outcome is the key to stability on the peninsula. However,

before this question is addressed, it is necessary to examine the ROK's reunification policy to determine what effect that policy can have in dealing with the catastrophic collapse of the DPRK.

At the South-North dialogue in June 1994, ROK President Kim Young Sam's unification policy was laid out. The policy consists of a phased process of unification with basic philosophy as "of building a single Korean national community rooted in the values of freedom and democracy."<sup>32</sup> There are three fundamental principles for unification:

Independence: Unification must be achieved on Korea's own according to the wishes of the Korean people and on the strength of its inherent national capabilities.

Peace: Unification must be achieved peacefully, not through war or the overthrow of the other side.

Democracy: Unification must be achieved democratically on the strength of the freedom and rights of all Koreans.<sup>33</sup>

The three phase process for unification allows for a gradual transition to unification in order to avoid the potential economic burden of reunification through absorption as happened in Germany. The three phases are:

Reconciliation and Cooperation Phase: The present hostility and confrontation between the South and the North is replaced with a relationship of reconciliation and cooperation.

Korean Commonwealth Phase: Peaceful coexistence and co-prosperity is secured and the two parts of Korea are joined in a single socio-economic community.

Single Nation-State Phase: A single nation-state is completed by fully integrating the South and the North.<sup>34</sup>

Obviously this process applies to the “soft landing” scenarios above in which reunification is conducted by mutual agreement. Interestingly there is no discussion of how reunification will occur in the event of a catastrophic collapse because the assumption is that in order to accomplish reunification in the three phased approach the north maintains a functional government until the final phase. However, with some modification, it is possible that this process could be applied to either of the “hard landing” scenarios as well. This will be examined in section four and will serve as the basis for courses of action for military operations to be conducted following the collapse of the DPRK. Before this can be addressed it is necessary to look at the interests, both long term and near term, of the Northeast Asian powers and the US. Once these interests are understood, then a feasible, acceptable, and suitable course of action can be proposed.

### III. Strategic Interests, Objectives, and Issues

The responsibility of great states is to serve and not to dominate the world.

Harry S. Truman, Message to Congress, April 16, 1945<sup>35</sup>

While Truman’s view is certainly the ideal, it is not always reality. All nations seek dominance in some form or another, whether economically, militarily, or diplomatically, if not over the world at least over their neighbors. The Korean Peninsula is a junction at which four of the world’s great powers meet: Russia, Japan, China, and the US and any discussion of the region must begin with an understanding of the nature of these nations. The purpose of this section is to examine the strategic interests, objectives, and concerns of the Northeast Asian nations and the US, looking first at the long term and then the near term following the catastrophic collapse of North Korea.

Interests are simply a nation’s fundamental wants, needs, and desires.<sup>36</sup> Interests vary from state to state and can change over time; however, there are several basic interests that are common to all nation-states, and these include survival and security,

political and territorial integrity, economic stability and well-being; and stability and world order.<sup>37</sup> Among the four powers that merge at the peninsula it is really only the view of world order which is open to question. In that respect each wants to achieve dominance in the world order in Northeast Asia in order to gain superior economic benefits while maintaining its other security interests. What is really different among these interests is how each nation determines the requirements to maintain them. These requirements can be termed national objectives, which are subordinate to interests, and are the “activities and situations a nation needs to promote, protect, or attain its interests.”<sup>38</sup> The following discussion illustrates the long term and short term national objectives of each nation which are required to satisfy their national interests.

### Russia

Russia continues to suffer from the effects of the breakup of the Soviet Union and as such, while remaining a near superpower strictly in terms of the size of its military, it is an economic basket case as it attempts to make market-based reforms.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the internal turmoil caused by the breakup will continue to plague Russian leadership for the foreseeable future. At present, Russia is not capable of projecting significant combat power beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union due to its internal problems in areas such as Chechnya as well as the lack of funds to maintain its military forces. Without a strong economy Russia cannot maintain the military strength it enjoyed as the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the number one long term objective is most likely the improvement of its economy by expanding export markets and exploiting its natural resources.

This is not to say that Russia has no military designs in Northeast Asia. In fact, as Stephen J. Blank, a professor of Russian/Soviet affairs, writes in a Strategic Studies Institute report, Russian interests in the Far East are primarily military with threats from its traditional enemies: the US, Japan, and China and within the Russian Far East it is the

military component that is dominant over the diplomatic and bureaucratic corps.<sup>41</sup> The past border disputes with China and the conflict with Japan over the Southern Kurile islands highlight the military issues. On the other hand it is also evident that some Russians have a pragmatic outlook in that leaders such as Viktor Chernomyrdin are now stressing that Russia must take an economic approach to secure its future and that the Far East “is the ‘gateway’ to the Asian, if not world, economies” and failure to stake an economic claim there is likely to prevent Russia from regaining its superpower status.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, Russia has a strong need to be economically engaged in Northeast Asia while at the same time its military sees the potential conflicts as the prevailing concerns. Its strategic interests remain the four basic ones listed above. What will be its long term objectives concerning the region following North Korean collapse? First, it desires to maintain, at a minimum, military parity in the region in order to protect its economic potential. It will want the region non-nuclear, especially Japan and a unified Korea. Economically it will need to have both a united Korea and Japan as trading partners. In light of this, if reunification occurs, it would want Korea to have a dynamic economy and have the region sufficiently stable in order to allow development and exploitation of the Special Economic Zone in the Tumen River district. It would probably begrudgingly accept continued US military presence in the region if its presence contributed to reduced military capabilities of a reunited Korea and Japan.

What actions would Russia take or allow to take place when North Korea collapses? Interestingly, two Russian and one American field grade officers published an article in the Journal of Slavic Military Studies, in which they postulate that future UN peace operations may encompass forces from more than just the three western allies who are permanent members of the Security Council and who traditionally participate in such operations. In this article they use a fictional scenario which takes place in Northeast Asia, where regional stability becomes disrupted and a UN mission is dispatched to conduct stability and security operations. The force consists of combined Russian and

US units and their sketch map looks surprisingly like the Korean peninsula.<sup>43</sup> This may be an indication of what the Russians may support in the event of collapse. In keeping with its strategic interests and its long term objectives concerning its economic development, then it is logical that a stable Korean peninsula, free of domination by the Chinese or Japanese, is paramount. Therefore, the Russians might be counted on to participate in combined operations to stabilize the region following DPRK disintegration in order to prevent dominance of the peninsula by other regional powers and to ensure long term economic development.

### Japan

Japan has historically been a major power in the region, although the nature of its power has changed. It has occupied both Korea and China and defeated Russia at sea and on the mainland in the 20th century. In the past it has been a significant military power; at present it is an economic superpower. Because of its past aggression, the traditional enmity which nations in the region feel for Japan, while not often voiced, is always present.

Japan requires the four core national interests in order to remain strong; however, a reunified Korea could become a potential threat, both economically and militarily. It feels the threat of the Russians in the Northern Territories (Southern Kurile Islands to the Russians) and fears that China, with its growing economic strength combined with its military power, is seeking to become the dominant regional power as well as a world superpower. In light of this, it has been developing a significant military capability by spending approximately one percent of its Gross National Product (GNP) for some twenty years on the Japanese Self Defense Force and currently has the seventh largest military budget in the world.<sup>44</sup>

Of all the nations in the region, Japan probably fears a reunified Korea more than any other and might even be the most willing to help prop up the DPRK if it could do so

without raising the ire of the US and the ROK. A Korea, reunified by peaceful means, with its combined military capability and economic potential would seriously challenge Japan. Furthermore, because of the animosities created by its past actions it may fear retribution from the peninsula.

Given that it cannot avoid a collapse, what are Japan's long term interests and objectives? Militarily, it probably perceives that US support to the region will wane given loss of the threat posed by the DPRK and the domestic political realities in the US; therefore, it must develop its military into a major regional power. It cannot tolerate a nuclear peninsula, but if a united Korea maintains a nuclear capability then Japan may attempt to produce deterrent weapons as well to maintain a balance of power, despite the fact its constitution prohibits development of anything more than a self defense force. Furthermore, without the buffer and distraction provided by a divided Korea, Japan will feel vulnerable to the natural invasion route from the mainland to its homeland. Paradoxically, while it would perceive a potential security threat from the mainland, economically, it must continue to expand its markets and gain access to additional resources. Thus it will want to be engaged with a reunited Korea and participate in the development of the Tumen River district to tap into the resources there, the trade routes into the interior of China and Mongolia, and the likely source of cheap labor in former North Korea. It is likely to enter into trade arrangements with Russia and other oil producing countries in order to guarantee access to oil.

In the event of catastrophic collapse of the north, Japan will want to participate in any military operation conducted there especially if it is under a UN flag. This will serve two purposes. First, it will help ensure access to the north and second, Japan desires to be a major player within the UN and by acting in this event it will use it to secure a permanent seat on the Security Council, if it hasn't already done so.<sup>45</sup> It will demand the dismantling of Korean nuclear weapons production facilities and at the same time offer significant aid in development of the north's infrastructure as an investment in its own

economic future. Thus, although Japan would like the peninsula to remain divided, there are opportunities to secure military, economic, and diplomatic objectives in the long and near term following the DPRK's demise and Japan will certainly do everything in its power to exploit them.

### China

Although Japan was the most recent occupier, China has the closest long term historical ties with Korea. China will probably be the most important player in any future scenario with Korea, whether war breaks out or the DPRK collapses. Like Japan, China is striving to be the dominant economic power in Asia and, most likely, eventually, the world. It is already the dominant regional military power and it will almost certainly continue to develop its military force as it expands its reach to the Spratly Islands and works to secure all its lands, through the reintegration of Hong Kong and Macao, and the eventual solution to its situation with Taiwan.

As with Japan, China will have concerns about a reunified Korea, but will also be poised to exploit the opportunities presented by it. First, the peninsula invasion route affects China in reverse from Japan. Second, the Korean border with China poses somewhat of a direct threat to its territorial integrity, especially with a militarily competent reunified Korea. Therefore, a long term objective will be to maintain significant military power in Manchuria to thwart any threat and maintain a superior balance of power.

China also will fear a reunited Korea economically. An article in the Wall Street Journal discusses an idea presented by a South Korean economic institute, the Damul, of an economic federation in Manchuria consisting of North and South Korea and Manchuria.<sup>46</sup> This concept, combined with the fact that there is a significant population of ethnic Koreans in China (as well as in Russia and Japan), could give China great pause

if Korea was reunified after the collapse of the DPRK and possessed both significant economic and military power that allowed it to compete for influence in the region.

Although there are concerns as stated above, China will also seek to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the collapse to further its economic interests and rid the mainland of the military threat posed by the US. It seems to be preparing for exploitation of the north even as this is being written. According to a recent report, it is apparently beginning to "reeducate" the 7,000 North Korean defectors who arrived in China in 1995 with the probable intention of building a favorable political base in Korea when they return after the collapse.<sup>47</sup> The economic opportunities available in the Tumen River region when the peninsula is stable will help China increase its economic strength to do fiscal battle with the US and Japan. In sum, the long term interests for China following the collapse will be continued economic growth, military strength, territorial protection, and regional stability.

In order to protect those interests the Chinese objectives will be to exploit the economic advantages in the north and the Tumen River region much as Japan will attempt to do. Diplomatically, it will seek to be the dominant influence on the peninsula playing on historic ties as well as the ties it has been building since it normalized relations with the ROK. Significant military power will remain in Manchuria to deter threats to its territory. It will demand a non-nuclear peninsula as well as the removal of US troops from the mainland; however, privately it will want the US to remain in Japan because they believe that as long as it is present in the islands it prevents Japan from seeking military expansionism.<sup>48</sup>

Following the DPRK collapse China is likely to be the first to offer military and economic assistance to the ROK to help stabilize the north. As soon as practicable it will enter into a joint venture to develop the Tumen River economic zone and establish dominance over the project. In a more subtle action the "reeducated" defectors will be repatriated to establish a favorable political base. The number one objective for China

will be to establish itself as the dominant actor in the region to offset the influence of the US, Japan, and Russia and may even seek a bilateral security agreement with the reunited Korea. Thus, to protect its long term strategic interests and accomplish its objectives China can be expected to take immediate diplomatic, economic , and coordinated military actions to assist the ROK in stabilizing the north following its collapse.

#### Republic of Korea

The number one long term objective for the ROK is the reunification of the peninsula in accordance with the principles for unification stated in section two. By reuniting, Korea can then finally ensure its four basic strategic interests in terms of survival and security, economic stability, territorial integrity, and a stable world order. However, with peaceful reunification, Korea will be able to establish new strategic objectives to ensure its interests. With the removal of the threat from the DPRK, it may be able to embark on new and even more dynamic economic development than in the past forty years. Also, it will want to become more active in the diplomatic arena, both in regional and worldwide organizations such as the UN. Military strength will be maintained at a level commensurate with the perceived threat so that funds can be shifted to other activities. Economically, a reunited Korea will challenge Japan and perhaps even China.

However, to get to the long term they will have to successfully deal with collapse. In reality, the South Koreans should not desire the collapse of the north because while it will bring an end to the military threat it will bring a whole host of new problems that will require significant expenditures just as happened to Germany when the Berlin Wall came down. Gradual reunification in accordance with its reunification policy is the ideal; however, if there is collapse the ROK is going to have the primary responsibility for returning the peninsula to normalcy. Certainly it will have to conduct relief of the suffering population, and it will have to conduct some kind of security operations to stabilize the area; however, the unanswered questions are: How will it pay for this, will it

allow the population from the north to migrate south, and what outside assistance will it solicit and be willing to accept? Without question, the ROK will be wary of any offers of outside aid especially from the regional powers, because in the long term it does not want to be beholden to any nation.

Among these four nations there is one common thread and that has to do with economic development. Specifically all four nations view the Tumen River region as an untapped resource with significant future economic potential, and is considered by many analysts to be one of the last resource frontiers.<sup>49</sup> Not only does it contain vast resource potential, with development of port facilities and expansion of rail lines, it will provide a more economical and faster route to the markets of Europe.<sup>50</sup> The Tumen River Area Development Project (TRADP) concept was developed in 1989 and was favorably received by Russia, China, and North Korea, which are contiguous to the river, as well as Japan, South Korea, and Mongolia and in 1991 the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) became interested. The TRADP envisions converting the area from Yanji in China to the Sea of Japan, from Chongjin in North Korea to Valdivostok in Russia into a major trade and transportation complex consisting of eleven harbors, three international airports, and an inland port rail hub.<sup>51</sup> Development has not progressed as fast as hoped due to the regional tensions and the fact that the three principal countries do not have the fiscal resources required.<sup>52</sup> With regional stability established due to Korean reunification and contributions from the regional powers commensurate with their abilities, the Tumen River region can be transformed into a Northeast Asian economic center of gravity and provide the foundation for regional cooperation stemming from the nations' common economic interests. It should figure prominently in any long term regional plans.

#### United States

According to the National Security Strategy (NSS), the US is a Pacific nation and that security must be the first concern in East Asia.<sup>53</sup> Like the countries of the region the

US strategic interests are economic and stability related. Although there is little threat to US territory currently, it is concerned with the territorial integrity and stability of its allies in order to ensure its own access to regional markets. The US has three primary objectives which support the four core fundamental strategic interests and guide its actions, and these include enhancing security, promoting prosperity at home, and promoting democracy.<sup>54</sup> Given those, it is clear that events on the peninsula are within the US sphere of strategic interests. US security is enhanced by regional stability in Northeast Asia; because it is a global economic power, it requires access to Asian markets to ensure prosperity at home, and democratic principles can best be fostered in a secure international environment. The long term objective for the peninsula is a non-nuclear, peacefully reunified Korea<sup>55</sup> and when it is reunified it could be even more important to the US than it is currently.

From the above discussions the long and near term interests of the regional powers were discerned. In light of those interests it is necessary to postulate what the US envisions the strategic situation should look like in the long term following the collapse of North Korea and the subsequent reunification. The overriding strategic objective for the US is economic growth through access to the region. To support this, the US must remain militarily engaged at some level in the region, either through deployment of forces and/or bi-lateral and multi-lateral security arrangements to ensure stability. It will want to preclude any of the regional powers gaining hegemonic influence. It will take all reasonable efforts to make the peninsula non-nuclear as well as keep Japan from developing into a nuclear power. Through investment and direct participation in the TRADP it can achieve major economic benefits. Ultimately, regional stability might be reached by active participation and cooperation among all the major regional powers in the Tumen River region resulting in a reduction of military forces and healthy market economies conducting free trade.

If the desired end state is a stable region without a single nation dominant, with the US engaged economically and militarily, free trade among all the countries, regional cooperation in pursuit of the TRADP, and a non-nuclear peninsula and Japan, the next logical step is to determine how to get there. In the next section, what the US should do, as well as what it can do, will be analyzed. By taking the long term strategic aim and end state shown above, an operational end state for the immediate post-collapse of North Korea will be proposed. From this end state, the operational objectives must be established and then a course of action developed to reach them. This process will take into account the objectives and concerns of the regional powers so that when it is determined what the US should do, it will equal what it can do in terms of the political and military realities.

#### IV. Military Operations Following North Korea Collapse

Victory will come to the side that outlasts the other.

Marshall Foch, Battle of the Marne, 1914<sup>56</sup>

The collapse of North Korea means that after some four decades the UNC, ROK and US together have outlasted it and finally achieved victory. With victory in war comes certain responsibilities for reestablishing order, caring for the beleaguered population, and rebuilding basic infrastructure.<sup>57</sup> Following WWII in both Europe and Japan, the US and the allies met these responsibilities by helping to rebuild the defeated nations in order to prevent, as Liddel-Hart would say, the “germs of another war.” To date they have been successful, but now the question of Korea must be dealt with and the fundamental question is do the UN, ROK, and US have the same responsibilities for aiding former North Korea as the allies did in rebuilding Germany and Japan? In this section the

requirements for post-conflict military, diplomatic, and economic activities in collapsed North Korea will be presented.

When beginning to plan a campaign, a planner must have a clear understanding of the strategic aim. Summarizing the analysis from section three, the long term strategic aims for Russia, China, and Japan include a stable peninsula in which each can exploit economic benefits, thus contributing to their internal stability and economic prosperity. Each will seek to be the dominant power and they all desire a non-nuclear peninsula. Russia and China want a reduced US military presence, and do not want Japan to increase its military beyond its current capability. The ROK desires reunification which leads to increased economic power in the region and in the world marketplace. The US desires access to Northeast Asian markets and to ensure that no single country dominates the region. In order to accomplish this, the US will want to retain the flexibility of being able to maintain a military presence in the region and possibly on the peninsula.

In the near term following the catastrophic collapse of North Korea, Russia, China, and Japan want regional stability as soon as possible in order to begin rapid economic exploitation of the region. China will desire to maintain territorial integrity and thus will do what is necessary to cause the North Korean population to remain in place. The ROK desires reunification on its terms through a smooth deliberate transition, while denying the other powers' attempts to gain influence over the population in the north. All four nations want to ensure that the DPRK nuclear facilities are brought under control and not allowed to fall into the hands of dissident factions. The US's near term end state is to have a non-nuclear peninsula, a reunified Korea without bankrupting the south, continued economic access to the region, and continued political influence throughout Northeast Asia. These strategic end states guide the development of North Korean post-collapse planning for all involved nations.

Before any plan can be developed it is necessary to make assumptions, and in this case three will be made since none of the events discussed in this monograph can be forecast with any certainty.

- The UN Security Council, ROK, and US recognize their responsibilities for stability, security, and humanitarian assistance operations in North Korea as part of post-conflict operations stemming from the uncompleted 1950-1953 Korean War, and they recognize the collapse of the DPRK as the termination of conflict.
- China, Russia, and Japan may participate in combined operations under UN control to conduct post-conflict operations, or at the very least will not object to or veto a UN operation to relieve suffering and restore order in former North Korea.
- The collapse scenario will be one of hard landing discussed in section two, though not resulting in an attack on the south, but in the total internal breakdown of North Korean society with either no government in place or factions vying for control and requiring a significant military commitment to bring stability and relief to the region.

These assumptions form the foundation for development of a plan to deal with the collapse of the north. Should they not become facts at the time of the breakdown, then branch plans might have to be considered or initiated.

Obviously, the main actor in any collapse scenario is the ROK. It has the moral responsibility and the historical, cultural, and national ties to the north that require it to be the lead, if not sole, player in dealing with DPRK collapse. However, the ROK must consider the fiscal realities of bringing stability to the north and reunification by absorption as happened in Germany. Following German reunification, that country experienced significant economic and social upheaval with rising unemployment rates, initial declining economic growth, and increased taxes. It is estimated that it had to spend more than six percent of its GNP, approximately one quarter of its annual budget, on reunification.<sup>58</sup> These costs are probably the main reason behind the ROK's three phase reunification plan; however, that plan is predicated on mutual agreement and gradual

implementation between the ROK and DPRK and does not allow for the collapse of the north and the subsequent immediate absorption by the south. What is the ROK plan in the event of collapse? During the course of this research no plan for such a contingency was discovered. It is likely that the ROK does have such a plan but will not publicize it for fear of alienating or provoking the north. In lieu of the actual plan the following is a recommended course of action for South Korea.

In actuality there are three choices for the ROK. First it can “go-it-alone” and deal unilaterally with the collapse and absorb not only the north but also the enormous economic costs associated with such action. Second, it can conduct bi-lateral operations in the north either with China, Russia, or the US. However, each of these countries would likely object as it would allow whichever country conducts the operation to have the best chance at gaining dominance over the region. The third course is to allow the UN to take the lead in relief and stability operations and allow a coalition approach to the situation. This would be the most difficult method as a coalition is inherently fragile and could be fraught with disagreements among members leading to less than ideal operations. However, there are some significant advantages to the ROK. Most importantly, a UN led operation could provide a long term commitment of a recognized world-wide organization which could set the conditions for the ROK to implement its three phase reunification plan. A UN force could be deployed to bring relief and stability to the population, establish a UN protectorate, while simultaneously embarking on infrastructure redevelopment through investment by the regional powers, and economic and political restructuring which would facilitate a gradual and smooth transition to a reunified Korea. In addition, because there are likely to be problems caused by the deployment of military forces, the use of forces under a UN mandate rather than unilateral ROK operations will keep the blame for any negative activities away from the ROK, thus facilitating a smoother transition to reunification. On the other hand it is possible that the south’s

credibility with the population of the north could be reduced because it allowed action by an outside organization.

When considering the interests of all the regional powers and the US, it appears that a UN led operation is the best course of action for dealing with a collapsed DPRK.

Although it would not be each nation's ideal choice, it does provide a consensus approach that will allow the attainment of most of the desired end states for all players. It would prevent dominance by a single nation since all the regional powers would have a chance to participate in some way or another, either through the direct employment of troops, as with possibly China, Russia, and the US or through fiscal resources from Japan. It would bring regional stability and allow infrastructure rebuilding in order to begin economic development. Finally, the cost for reunification would be spread among the contributing nations in return for future economic benefit.

Regardless of which approach is ultimately used, there are four mission essential tasks which deal specifically with operations upon the catastrophic collapse of the DPRK that must be accomplished in order for any of the regional powers to accomplish their objectives and protect their interests. These tasks must be executed near simultaneously and as soon as possible after the nature of the collapse is identified because they are mutually supporting and cannot be conducted unilaterally without regard to the others.

- Establishment of security and stability

The paramount requirement is for security and stability to prevent the outbreak of internal conflict in a fight for scarce resources, prevent spillover into China, Russia, and the ROK, as well as the potential migration by any means of a vast North Korean population. Elements of the coalition will have to immediately deploy and make contact with the various factions vying for control in order to arrange for the introduction of the main body of the coalition force. Once the main elements deploy they will focus on

reestablishing law and order by developing existing local security systems and providing support to them. A stable environment sets the conditions for all other tasks to be accomplished; however, this does not mean that other operations will not be undertaken until security and stability are established.

- Humanitarian relief operations

As already discussed, the current situation in North Korea is a major contributor to the present instability and will help in causing the ultimate collapse of the regime. If relief is not brought to the suffering population, the seeds of another war, or as a minimum, an insurgency will be sown. Large scale relief operations must be conducted simultaneously with establishing security and stability because by taking away the root cause of the problems of the population, the potential for the outbreak of civil strife is reduced. Furthermore, by getting relief to the people where they live, the desire for migration either north to China and Russia or south to the ROK is lessened. Only by providing relief can a legitimate and effective “stay put” policy be implemented. In addition to military forces conducting humanitarian relief, it can be expected that a large number of non-governmental organizations and private volunteer organizations will contribute to this effort and they must be allowed to do so. The military forces must take advantage of this aid and integrate them as best as possible into operations.

- Security of nuclear research, production, storage, and delivery facilities

Accomplishment of this task will reduce the likelihood of nuclear material or technology being transferred to other potentially hostile regimes or terrorist organizations. This single task is one in which all the regional powers have a common interest. All weapons related material will have to be secured and then disposed of in a verifiable manner. This will be a significant military operation and will require assistance from the UN’s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Additionally, all the major powers

in the region will want to have representatives participate in order to ensure that no material remains unaccounted for.

- Disarming, demobilizing, and resettling the DPRK military

Aside from the nuclear issue, the 1.2 million man military will be the most destabilizing factor in the north. This sensitive operation will require great skill in order to prevent further violence. It will have to be done through an effective information program and negotiations by military and diplomatic leaders backed up by a credible capability to coerce should negotiations fail. As with security and stability, effective humanitarian relief operations will make this task easier by removing the need to have to fight for survival.

The above tasks are mission essential and must be the focus of initial military operations immediately following the disintegration of the DPRK regime. Once these four tasks and conditions are met, the coalition must begin work on tasks that will ensure long term stability and facilitate reunification. First, it must establish a "care-taker" or interim government under UN guidance in order to begin the transition to reunification under the ROK three phase plan. Once such an organization is established, the reconciliation and cooperation phase can begin in earnest. Because the north will be stable and reunification is projected, business ventures can be initiated to begin development of the north's infrastructure. This will accomplish two important intermediate ends. First, it will begin to bring prosperity to the population of the north and initiate them into the free market economic system. Second, development of infrastructure will prepare for efficient future economic development.

When phase one is judged to be sufficiently successful, it will be time to move into phase two, which is the establishment of a Korean commonwealth. During this phase the South Korean political processes will be introduced into the northern provinces. The north's historic political boundaries will be maintained; however, local elections will be held regularly using the ROK model. The UN will still maintain a presence and provide

assistance and guidance to the north to facilitate this transition. The presence will be characterized by minimal military elements with emphasis on development organizations. Once this phase is deemed complete, most likely as judged by successful elections and the desires of the population as expressed through referendums, it will be time to enter phase three, the single nation-state, at which time all UN elements will depart leaving a reunified peninsula.

If a coalition is established to deal with the North Korean collapse, the obvious contributors will be the five powers discussed throughout this monograph: China, Russia, Japan, the ROK, and the US. It is necessary to briefly sketch the potential contributions each would make to the operation. China, Russia, the ROK, and US would contribute military forces to conduct the full range of missions outlined above. Each of these countries has the ability to make significant contributions in terms of security forces, command and control elements, medical and engineering detachments, among others, required to conduct large scale humanitarian relief. Few other countries in the world can match the broad capabilities that these countries possess; therefore, they should be the main elements of the coalition force. In addition, they would encourage their own business communities to make contributions either directly through the development of enterprises in the north, or indirectly through financial contributions to aid organizations. Japan would not be asked to participate with military force due to the historic enmity among the people on the mainland caused by Japan's past aggression not only on the peninsula, but in Manchuria prior to and during the Second World War, and even Russia at the turn of the century. Currently, relations remain tense between Korea and Japan due to disputes over the ownership of the unoccupied island of Tok-do in between the two countries as well as over reparations and apologies stemming from the Korean and other Asian "comfort women" exploited by the Japanese military during WWII. Although Japanese military forces would be unacceptable on the peninsula, direct

financial contribution, investment, and non-governmental and private volunteer organizations would likely be welcomed.

As with any plan developed at the strategic level it is necessary to consider all instruments of national power, diplomatic, economic, informational, as well as military, because together they play a significant role in determining the success or failure of an operation. In the collapsed north it will be no different. It will be the integration of all elements striving for the strategic aims stated above which will provide the foundation for a stable, reunified Korea.

Diplomatic efforts must be focused on building and sustaining a coalition under UN control. Immediately upon recognition of the collapse, the UN Security Council must establish a mandate which will authorize a coalition to conduct operations in the north. This should be based on the combined UNC, ROK, and US responsibility for conducting post-conflict operations stemming from the final termination of the Korean War. South Korea must request such assistance and be willing to reunify using a combination of its three phase reunification plan with the assistance of the UN. The coalition should consist of China, Russia, the US and the ROK as the main contributors. Although Japan will likely desire to participate, due to the historical enmity between the Koreans and Japanese, the commitment of Japanese defense forces will most likely be deemed unacceptable. Furthermore, China and Russia will be wary of having Japanese troops on the mainland; therefore, Japan should contribute to the coalition through financial aid to the UN and private economic investment in the region because Japanese business will be welcome but its military will not. The coalition and the ROK must recognize the north's internal political structure at the province and local level and must use it to make reunification work. Remnants of the old regime from the national level must be allowed to leave the country and have sanctuary in a third country to prevent destabilization and attempts to revert to its old system. Most important, this remaining senior leadership must be identified and given the opportunity to leave the country and have an

opportunity to make a new life. The reason for this is to prevent a Maoist-type “long march” and a possible insurgency. Finally, diplomacy must focus on the using the region as a way to bring the regional powers into a long term cooperative arrangement emphasizing mutual economic prosperity and non-aggression. The coalition can in itself become the center of gravity for regional security and economic development.

Information programs must support building and sustaining the coalition. The theme should be that the UN and its UNC has a responsibility to conduct post-conflict operations resulting from the final termination of the Korean War and that only a coalition of the major regional powers can bring the war to a successful conclusion. Internally in the north an information program should be developed which exploits the “juche” philosophy as uniquely Korean as opposed to *North* Korean and that it can only be realized by a gradual transition to a reunified peninsula.

Economically, the combined resources of all the regional powers should be solicited in return for access to investment opportunity in the region. The economic effort initially should be focused on infrastructure rebuilding, then on natural resource exploration and industrial development. The unifying economic focus should be on development of the Tumen River region. This area has the resources, industrial, and transportation potential to benefit all the major regional actors. Investment by private business should be encouraged beginning as soon as the region is adequately secure. The sooner investment occurs the sooner the population will be able to obtain jobs and begin experiencing market economics.

Given a coalition operation under a UN mandate, the next issue is to determine the basic structure and organization for operations. Historically in UN operations each member of the coalition is assigned a geographic area of operations or responsibility. Often in cases like this there will be a disparity between areas based on the capabilities and limitations of the specific coalition force working in that area. Unequal aid and assistance may prevent the coalition from maintaining stability and continued unrest will

hamper economic investment. In addition to dividing an operational area in accordance with the participating nations, sometimes the areas of operation are determined based on arbitrary geographical considerations or the capabilities of the coalition forces. An historical example of this is the initial division of the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel in 1945 which was based on an arbitrary decision by bureaucrats with no concern for the long term effects of such a division. An operation in the collapsed north will have the largest military threat a UN operation has ever faced; therefore, every effort should be made to minimize and neutralize it. One of the ways to do this is to organize the coalition in a different form both in terms of military structure and areas of operation. First the coalition should be organized as an actual combined force and not as just the sum of various national contingents. Each area of operations should contain a battalion-sized unit from each member of the coalition operating under a combined headquarters of approximately brigade size. Furthermore, the operational areas should be based on existing local and provincial political structures. By organizing the operational area based on existing political structures, as well as recognizing and using those structures, the legitimacy of the coalition force will be enhanced and the chances of success increased.

There are twelve provinces in north.<sup>59</sup> In each, a composite brigade size unit could be deployed based on the concept of the Security Assistance Force (SAF) found in US doctrine.<sup>60</sup> Such a coalition force could consist of a three to four battalions of infantry from each of the contributing countries, with augmentation of engineer, medical, aviation, signal, military police, civil affairs, psychological operations, and logistics support units. Elements from ROK and US special operations units could be attached to each coalition force to provide linguist support and enhance command, control, and communication by conducting their doctrinal coalition support mission. The command headquarters for each province would be a combined organization and the commanders for each would be divided among the four major powers with three each from China, Russia, the ROK, and the US. The north would not be divided into sectors by country, i.e., there would be no

Chinese or US sector, it would only have its normal political provinces with a coalition force assigned to it to conduct security and stability and humanitarian assistance operations. Although such a unique organization would have inherent difficulties due to its combined nature, it is likely that only an organizational structure such as this would preclude any of the powers from achieving dominance in any particular area or of the north as a whole as well as to spread the costs of the operation among the coalition.

The final concern in terms of organization is command and control. On the surface the simplest method would seem to be to use the existing UN Command structure. It is in place and functioning and certainly has more area expertise than any existing or ad hoc command element could. However, it is likely that Russia and China would object to having their military forces placed under the operational control of an organization dominated by US personnel. On the other hand, it may be possible to use the existing UNC and augment it with Chinese and Russian staff members and perhaps name a Russian and Chinese deputy, as well, to satisfy them. From purely an efficiency standpoint the UNC is the obvious choice and the effort should be made to establish it as the headquarters to deal with the collapse of North Korea.

In summary, it is apparent that the DPRK is on the verge of collapse and that it may suffer a hard landing, though possibly not involving an attack on the south. To deal with the collapse the best course of action seems to be one of using the UN to form a coalition among China, Russia, the ROK, and the US in order to conduct stability, security, and humanitarian relief operations in the north. Immediate reunification with the south should be avoided, and the ROK's three phase reunification plan should remain the framework for the transition with the difference being that the UN and the coalition provide the security and stability to facilitate a deliberate and gradual reunification. The economic center of gravity is the Tumen River region and is likely to be the carrot that helps bring the coalition together. By building a coalition and allowing for a gradual reunification process, the Korean peninsula can once again become united in a stable and

secure environment and all the regional countries can benefit from the economic opportunities provided by the resources of the area.

#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> B.H. Liddel-Hart quoted in "Balancing the Trinity: The Fine Art of Conflict Termination". by Susan E. Strednansky, MAJ, USAF. Air University Press, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. February 1996. 1.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Clinton, "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement." (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1995), 28.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Eberstadt, Korea Approaches Reunification, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 130.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Pub 3-0 Doctrine for Joint Operations (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1995), B-1.

<sup>5</sup> Unattributed, "DIA Director suggests New N Korea approach," Jane's Defence Weekly, January 17, 1996, 8.

<sup>6</sup> What is clear is that the in the post-Cold War world militaries around the globe, primarily under the auspices of the UN, are now involved in not only the prevention and resolution of conventional conflicts, but also in *non-conventional* conflicts (a non-doctrinal term). Conflict is defined as "an armed struggle or clash between organized political parties within a nation or between nations in order to achieve limited political or military objectives." (Joint Staff Officers Handbook, 1993) This definition, though somewhat more ambiguous than war, is still rather straightforward and simple to understand. However, non-conventional conflict is something even more ambiguous and difficult to understand. It extends the continuum of conflict. Conflict in the conventional sense begins when the armed struggle begins; however, non-conventional conflict encompasses all of the types of conflict listed above, starting with the *threat* or *possibility* of conflict and extending past conflict termination, because the conditions that gave rise to hostilities in the first place may still remain, though not visible or easily recognized. It also includes armed clashes by *unorganized* groups that are not seeking to achieve any political or military objectives. Non-conventional conflict encompasses the lawlessness of a society in which the governmental system has collapsed, but no organized group has risen to take its place. Violence and terrorist-like activity can occur out of frustration with no identifiable purpose. This type of conflict is non-conventional, because it is difficult to determine the objectives and methods of the actors, perhaps difficult to even determine the actors, and thus it is difficult to apply conventional elements of power. This is the sensitive and complex environment in which peace operations may increasingly take place. Although the situation may not be a traditional insurgency, there will likely be many of its characteristics present. In these types of non-conventional environments it is the issue of *perceived legitimacy* by the people and the political powers involved that places new stresses on UN forces whose legitimacy is no longer a matter of fact. This definition is taken from the author's first term monograph "Support to United Nations Forces: Is There a Role for United States Special Operations Forces?" (page 9)

<sup>7</sup> Bill Gertz, "US Commander in Korea sees North near Disintegration," Washington Times, 16 March 1996, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Unattributed, "Pyongyang Regime Faces Threat of Collapse," The Korea Herald, March 8, 1996, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Young Whan Kihl, ed., Korea and the World: Beyond the Cold War. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Debs Heinl, Jr, ed. Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations, (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1966), 69.

<sup>11</sup>Yonhap News Service, "North Korea to Face 1.9 Million-Ton Grain Shortage," The Korea Herald, March 3, 1996, 3.

<sup>12</sup>Bill Gertz, "3 Cannibalism Cases Spark Inquiry by Kim Jong Il," Washington Times, March 6, 1996, A3.

<sup>13</sup>William Matthews, "Luck: 'Violent' Collapse Of North Korea Could Trigger War With South," Army Time, April 15, 1996.

<sup>14</sup>Yonhap News Service, "Report Says North Korean Troops Receiving Adequate Food Supplies," Korea Herald, March 28, 1996, 2.

<sup>15</sup>CIA World Fact Book for North Korea 1995, (On Line), Available from Korea Web Weekly, [www.kimsoft.com](http://www.kimsoft.com).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Jim Mann, "US is Trying to Prevent Tailspin by North Korea," The Los Angeles Times, (Washington edition) February 5, 1996, 2.

<sup>18</sup>"Exclusive: Kim Jong Il Receives his First Foreign Dignitary," from the Far Eastern Economic Review, March 6, 1996 as quoted in the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report, March 5, 1996, available from the Nautilus Institute, [npr@igc.apc.org](mailto:npr@igc.apc.org).

<sup>19</sup>Kim Yong-bom, "North Korea Operating 'Red Capitalist Groups' Overseas," Korea Times, March 28, 1996, 3. See also "Pyongyang Recalls Children of High-Ranking Officials," Korea Herald, February 22, 1996, 2. Also, Kevin Sullivan, "Missing Ex-Wife Adds to North Korean Leader's Woes," Washington Post, February 14, 1996, 17.

<sup>20</sup>Mary Jordan, "Speculation Grows on Demise of N. Korea," Washington Post, April 6, 1996, 11.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Crane Brinton, The Anatomy of a Revolution, (New York: Vintage Books), 1965, 39.

<sup>23</sup>Yonhap News Service, "NK's Kim to Assume Presidency After 2-Year Mourning," Korea Times, February 3, 1996, 2.

<sup>24</sup>"Exclusive: Kim Jong Il Receives his First Foreign Dignitary."

<sup>25</sup>Sun Tzu, The Art Of War, Samuel Griffith, trans., (London: Oxford University Press) 1963, 79.

<sup>26</sup>Kevin Sullivan, "N. Koreans Enter DMZ A 3rd Time," Washington Post, April 8, 1996, 1.

<sup>27</sup>"Kim Visits Forward Positions," Jie Fang Daily (Pyongyang) March 24, 1996, A4. As quoted in the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network Daily Report, March 30, 1996, available from the Nautilus Institute, [npr@igc.apc.org](mailto:npr@igc.apc.org).

<sup>28</sup>Bill Gertz, "US Intelligence: China Doesn't See N. Korea Attacking," Washington Times, March 29, 1996, 17.

<sup>29</sup>Ahn Byung-joon, "The Man Who Would Be Kim," Foreign Affairs, November/December 1994, 100-101.

<sup>30</sup>Bob Collins, "Patterns of Collapse in North Korea," The Combined Forces Command C5 Civil Affairs Newsletter, Seoul, Korea, January 1996, 2-12.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 7 and 11.

<sup>32</sup>"The Unification Policy of the Kim Young Sam Administration," (on-line) (January 1996) from the Korean Web Weekly Magazine, File: Korean Unification Policy, [www.kimsoft.com](http://www.kimsoft.com).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Heinl, 203.

<sup>36</sup>LTC Ted Davis, "Concepts of International Politics and Sovereign Nation-States," Joint and Combined Environments (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Department of Joint and Combined Operations), 1994, 16.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>39</sup>Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Viotti, eds., The Defense Policy of Nations: A Comparative Study, Third Edition, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 221.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. 222.

<sup>41</sup>Stephen J. Banks, "The New Russia in the New Asia," (Carlisle, PA: The US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, July 22, 1994), 3.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>43</sup>A.V. Demurenko, V.K. Kolpanov, and Timothy L Thomas, "Peacekeeping: A Joint Russian-US Operational Scenario," The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Volume 7, Number 3, September 1994, 522.

<sup>44</sup>Defense Agency, Japan, "Defense of Japan," (Tokyo, JA: Defense Agency, Japan, July 1994), 99 and 282.

<sup>45</sup>Michael Blaker, "Japan in 1994: Out with the Old, In with the New?" Asian Survey, January 1995, 8.

<sup>46</sup>Steve Glain, "After 1,300 Years, White-Collar Armies Target Manchuria," The Wall Street Journal, October 9, 1995, 1.

<sup>47</sup>Yonhap News Service, "Report Says 7,000 North Koreans Fled to China," Korea Times, March 29, 1996, 1.

<sup>48</sup>Philip Shenon, "Gunboat Diplomacy, '96 Model," New York Times, March 17, 1996, IV-1.

<sup>49</sup>"Tumen River Plan," (On-line) Korca Web Weekly Magazine, undated, [www.kimsoft.com](http://www.kimsoft.com).

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Clinton, 28.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>56</sup>Robert A Fitton, ed. Leadership: Quotations from the Military Tradition, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 222.

<sup>57</sup>John T. Fishel, Liberation, Occupation, and Rescue: War Termination and Desert Storm, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: The Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1992), 1.

<sup>58</sup>Young, 266.

<sup>59</sup>Tai Sung An, North Korea: A Political Handbook, (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1983), 56. See also 1995 CIA Factbook. There are nine provinces and three special cities that are administered as provinces.

<sup>60</sup>Department of the Army, FM 100-20 Low Intensity Conflict, (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1981), 128. See also Department of the Army, FM 100-20 Low Intensity Conflict, (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1990) and Department of the Army, FM 31-20, Doctrine for Special Forces Operations, (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1990).

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